

Testimony of Ed Chmielewski, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Southeastern Regional Action Council (SERAC), Selectman - Town of Salem, Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Salem Local Prevention Council, 35 year CT Career Law Enforcement Professional and retired Major, CT Army National Guard.

Concerning funding for Regional Action Councils
Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services – February 23, 2017

Senator Gerratana, Senator Somers, Senator Formica, Senator Osten, Representative Dillon, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Subcommittee;

Thank you for your service and for leadership during these fiscally challenging times. Please help us, to help you, to help you serve your constituents.

I stand before you today to respectfully voice my testimony in strong opposition to the proposed cuts to the Regional Action Councils across the State of CT.

My name is Ed Chmielewski and I am Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Southeastern Regional Action Council (SERAC) and the Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Salem Local Prevention Council. I am also a Selectman in town of Salem.

I am a 35 year Connecticut Career Law Enforcement Professional who has served as a Police Sergeant, DARE Officer, Tactical Narcotics Team Commander and Undercover Narcotics Investigator assigned to the CT State Police. I have served Connecticut as a Juvenile Probation Officer, an Adult Probation Officer and as a Chief Probation Officer.

I retired as a Major from the CT Army National Guard after 22 years of service. I am honored and privileged to be the Chairman of Southeastern Regional Action Council Board of Directors. I appreciate having the opportunity to share some of my thoughts regarding the Community Service Leadership role SERAC plays in in Southeastern Connecticut.

SERAC is committed to quality public service, to growth and to sustainability. Our record of success was achieved due to the extraordinary collaboration and tireless work of SERAC staff, board members and community partners.

SERAC has caring, compassionate and professional staff. Under the leadership of Executive Director Michele Devine our staff works as a cohesive team that fosters community collaboration, adheres to best practices in the field and thrives on good old fashion “boots on the ground hard work”. It is truly remarkable our SERAC staff is able to do so much good with so little funding. The proposed cuts would be catastrophic to SERAC and to our community partners.

The Board of Directors at SERAC is dedicated, diverse and professional. Our Board members include volunteers with diverse skill set that includes backgrounds in mental health and addiction services, counseling, law enforcement, education and higher education.

Our community partners provide a wealth of knowledge, community insight and support and include: chief elected officials, police chiefs, school superintendents, business professionals, legislators, major substance abuse service providers, religious organizations and the media to name a few.

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As you all know, SERAC is one of 13 Regional Action Councils or RACS created in 1989 by the Connecticut Legislature. At that time, we were tasked us to help communities address the problems of substance abuse and addiction on a “Local Level”.

I mentioned my law enforcement background because in 1989, I was a young Police Officer assigned as an Undercover Narcotics Officer assigned to the Connecticut State Police. Soon thereafter I was promoted to Police Sergeant. I became a leader in early days of community policing. Though I was rising up the ranks, I soon became disheartened with the enforcement focus of police work.

My life experience made me realized that the War on Drugs “could not” and “would not” solely won by arrest and incarceration. I realized that individuals and families of individuals with mental health and addiction related problems needed help and support at the “Local Level”. I realized that victory could only a multi-pronged approach so I changed careers and for the last 23 years, I have served Connecticut as a Juvenile Probation Officer, an Adult Probation Officer and a Chief Probation Officer.

Some people have called me a subject matter expert. I am here today to tell you that the Regional Action Council initiative is exceeding the job you asked us to do because since 1989. I am here today to tell you that I have seen SERAC in action and have interacted with SERAC while serving in all the positions I have held from Police Officer, Probation Officer to Town Selectman. I am here to testify that I have seen SERAC provide the services that you asked us to do in 1989. I am here to testify that SERAC has saved lives in Southeastern Connecticut.

As the Chairman of the Board of Directors at SERAC, I’m pleased with how we are meeting our responsibilities. I have challenged our staff to continue to think “outside the box” in order to do even more. But we can’t do our job without your help.

My Commitment to you is simple. SERAC will continue to provide pro-active professional services to the approximate 265,243 constituents who live in the 20 communities we proudly serve.

With our small funding of about \$195,000, I am asking you to invest approximately .73 cents for each of our constituents and to fully fund the SERAC and our sister RACS.

Please, I beg you, let us do the job you asked us to do in 1989 and restore the amount cut from the Regional Action Councils. I implore you to fund .73 cents to our 265,243 constituents.

Help us, to help you, to serve your constituents. .73 cents has and will continue to save a life.

Sincerely,

Ed Chmielewski

SERAC - Chairman of the Board of Directors

Selectman - Town of Salem

Salem Local Prevention Council Chairman of the Board of Directors